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MORALITY

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STAGE-PLAYS

SERIOUSLY

CONSIDERED.

[Adam Ferguson] LL.D.

EDINBURGH:

Printed in the year M,DCC,LVII.

(Price Sixpence.)

Lebony

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NOTHING can be more alarming, to every well-wisher to true religion, than to find disputes arising among its Professors, which may end in divisions and animosities hurtful to the spirit of religion itself. People who begin such disputes have much to answer for, unless they have sufficient reason for what they do. It is well known, that the people of this country are well disposed, sober and religious; that they are ready to take every public offence much to heart, and, as far as their disapprobation will operate, that they strenuously contribute to remove it. We should therefore beware of trifling with their honest zeal, or of making them waste, against objects of a harmless or indifferent nature, that opposition,
A which

which should be all employed against real vices and corruptions. Mistakes in this article are attended with many ill consequences ; they mislead our apprehensions of duty ; they create ill-will, and become a source of groundless antipathy between persons, who should entertain sentiments of kindness and charity towards one another. I am sorry that there should be any appearances of this kind amongst us at present, and would think myself very happy in contributing to remove them. We are alarmed with an imputation of irreligion, which is cast upon the entertainments of the Theatre ; and it may be apprehended, that persons who listen to this charge will think very unfavourably, if not with some degree of antipathy, of their neighbours, who continue to take any part in such entertainments. I hope that no person would chuse to bear the imputation of hating his brother without a cause, and that every well-disposed person will be glad to hear any observations which may help us to form a right judgment of one another.

The Stage has subsisted in *Britain* about two hundred years ; it has been during this period the entertainment of people of distinction, and of others too, who were enabled to partake of it. Whether it has corrupted our people in any degree, is a question not easily determined. I am inclined to believe, that, considering the mixture of good and
bad

bad men which are to be found in every age, the people of this island are not inferior to those of any other age or country whatever. This will be a presumption, that, if Plays are a poison, it is at least but slow in its operations. Another observation which I will make by the way, is, that however the Stage may have corrupted our people, the manners of the people have so far prevailed, as, in some respects, to have reformed the Stage. On this head we may come to a sure conclusion, because we may compare Plays that were admitted during some part of this period, with those which are now chiefly in repute. In making this comparison it will appear, that a certain degree of indecency and licentiousness once permitted, is now rejected, and that Plays more pure, and of a better moral tendency are either chosen from our antient stock, or that these qualities at least are expected from every Writer of the present age. We cannot be too anxious in forwarding this reformation, when it is in any degree incomplete. But I am sensible that it is in vain to speak in this manner, whilst an opinion remains, that the very name and form of a Play is offensive and pernicious. I confess that I am at a loss fully to account to myself for the prevalence of such an opinion. It is not derived from Scripture; for I cannot recollect any thing like a warning against the Stage, either in the Old or New Testament.

Our

Our Saviour, who appeared at a time when Plays were in high repute in different parts of the *Roman* Empire, says nothing to warn us of their immorality. The Apostle *Paul*, in writing his Epistle to the *Romans*, amidst various instructions and cautions which he gives, is silent on the subject of Plays, which were then in high repute amongst the people he was writing to. In preaching at *Athens*, the same Apostle expressly quotes a sentence from one of the *Greek* Poets, Acts xvii. 28. ; *For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain of your own Poets have said.* This is a very sublime expression, and beautifully applied by the Apostle, as will appear on consulting the context. It shows that he was sensible of the instructions and good impressions which we may receive from poetry, and was directed, by that Spirit which supported him in his Ministry, to apply it so properly to those purposes. Nor is this the only proof he has given of an esteem for good performances of this nature. He has, in the first Epistle to the *Corinthians*, xv. 33. inserted into the sacred text a line from a *Greek* Play, which now subsists : *Be not deceived, evil communications corrupt good manners.* Who does not see that such sentiments, and such instructions must be improving to mankind, wherever they are found, whether in prose discourse, or in a Play ? And, if the whole strain of a Play is framed to this purpose,

pose, it surely deserves esteem and encouragement from every well disposed person, who has the means of filling up his vacant hours with such entertainments. I am sorry that any person should have overlooked this consideration, or given reins to a headlong zeal against the Stage, so unlike the wisdom and discernment of the holy Apostle, whom we have quoted. The Stage indeed may be abused, and so may the wisest institutions of mankind: Religion itself can hardly be preserved from corruption: The Papists, and other Sectaries, daily misapply the doctrines of Scripture, to serve their own unlawful purposes. The pulpit, in the possession of every party, into which Christians are unhappily divided, has often rung with other sounds than those of the Gospel of peace; and put us in mind, that when the best things fall into the hands of corrupt men, then the wisest and most sacred institutions may suffer some abuse: But this will furnish no argument against any subject which is so abused. I should be sorry to offer any apology for abuses which may have appeared on the Stage: I hope that every audience, in our times, will have judgment and severity enough to reject examples of this nature: But I cannot admit any such abuse, as a valid argument against the Stage in general. We do not prohibit the use of food and drink, because some men abuse them to excess; nor do we forbid all relaxation

relaxation from business, because some unhappy persons do mischief in their sports : Neither should we condemn every poetical composition, intended for the Stage, because some Writings of this kind have been found faulty and licentious. People, who are acquainted with performances of this nature, are sensible that a number of grave, moral and edifying pieces, would, by such an undistinguishing ruin, be lost to mankind. The Authors of such works have been esteemed worthy of great praise, and have been thought to bear a considerable part in promoting the interest of virtue. We cannot doubt of this, when we find any degree of regard paid to them in Holy Writ ; and what we have observed to this purpose above, is sufficient to connect their defence with the honour of Scripture itself. This is more than apology sufficient for endeavouring to show, that such performances may not only be innocent, but be of great benefit to mankind. I am sensible that persons who need much information on this head, may likewise need to be told what is the nature of a Play ; and I will now give some notion of it, that every person, if possible, may be enabled to judge for himself.

Plays are of two kinds, called *Tragedy* and *Comedy* ; the one represents the actions of common life, and compositions of this nature have been the most liable to abuse ; be-
cause

cause wit and ridicule are sometimes found to be petulant, and the familiarity of this style is more easily mixed with indecencies : But the perfection of Comedy consists in exposing to just ridicule the follies and absurd vices of ordinary men ; where it fails in this purpose, the abuse is manifest, and will be condemned by every judicious audience. Tragedy, on the other hand, is serious, grave and majestic ; it represents the actions of great men, and their conduct chiefly on great and interesting occasions, their struggles in difficult and distressing situations, where the sentiments they express raise admiration or pity, and where the very faults they commit become so many warnings to the spectator. Every Tragedy therefore contains a story, and may convey instruction in the same manner with a parable or fable ; it differs only in the form, and not in the effect. In a Parable, the story is related ; in Tragedy, the subject is expressed by some action and conversation which is represented, and we are left to collect the story from the speeches of the persons concerned in it. In a Parable, we wait for the moral till the story is concluded, when the whole appears to have been an illustration of some moral precept ; in a good Tragedy, we have a continued moral from beginning to end ; the characters, the sentiments, and the observations, which come from the persons who speak, are calculated to move and instruct us ;
and

and we are deeply engaged by such representations, because we take part with amiable characters, and become anxious about the event. It must appear strange, to say, that every story, parable or fable, either in the form of narration, or in that of a Tragedy, must be a wrong thing in itself. One story, indeed, however told, may be dull, tiresome, and leave bad impressions ; but another story, we all know, may be agreeable, entertaining, and leave the best impressions on the hearts of the hearers. We cannot therefore condemn the story represented in any Tragedy, till we know of what kind it is, till we know whether it tends to leave good impressions or bad ones, in the minds of the hearers. If it is found to leave good impressions, it should certainly be commended, and highly deserves the countenance which the Apostle *Paul* hath given to such works, altho' written even by Heathens. In order to show in what manner a tender and affecting story improves the heart, and strengthens every good disposition, I shall consider the history of *Joseph* and his cruel brothers in that view. We find the elder brothers moved with envy and malice against an innocent child, because he had his father's affection, and was distinguished by forebodings of Divine favour. They resolved to shed his blood, when he came to them alone, in the desert ; but being diverted from this cruel purpose, they sold him as a slave

to

to strangers who were passing thro' the wilderness. Every humane person, who reads this piece of history, will be moved at the distress of the innocent sufferer, and will feel a horror at the cruelty of the brothers. Here then we may observe, that compassion for the distressed, and indignation at the wicked, are the best dispositions which men can entertain; and that every story which leaves such impressions must be very edifying and instructive to good men. The remaining part of this history is very beautiful, and we cannot help considering it. *Joseph* was preserved, and, by the Divine favour, came to a station of honour and great power. Famine obliged his brothers to seek relief in that country where he was become a ruler. When they appeared before him, he disguised the first emotion of his soul, under an aspect of severity. He questioned them about his father's condition; and, when mention was made of his younger brother, who had no share in the cruel offence committed against him, he discovered an earnest desire to see him. When, at last, he declared himself to be their brother *Joseph*, they were struck with remorse and terror: But he repaid their former cruelties with a generous forgiveness; he relieved their distress; he saw again his aged father, and paid the duty of a grateful child. Whilst we are attending to a story of this kind, it nourishes every good disposition of the heart,

and we are the better prepared by it to act a noble, generous and compassionate part towards our fellow-creatures. If we can imitate such circumstances in the story of a Tragedy, we may presume that the effect will be similar ; and it must appear strange, to find any Tragedy censured, before we pretend to show that it fails in this point. The subject we are now upon has been brought in question, on occasion of the Tragedy of DOUGLAS ; and no person sure can judge of that performance, who is not acquainted with the conduct of the story on which it is built. But, if any person has proceeded so far, from a general disapprobation of the Stage, I am persuaded, that a few reflexions upon the representations of this performance, would be sufficient to reconcile him to it. It was well received by every audience, and seemed to make a deep impression. . The sentiments it excites are those of admiration of virtue, compassion to the distressed, and indignation against the wicked cause of their sufferings. In every story of distress, which is not merely accidental, wicked characters must appear, as well as good ones ; for we cannot impute injury and cruelty to any other but the wicked : Their appearance however improves the mind, by fostering our aversion to wickedness, in the same degree as the view of amiable characters heightens our love of virtue, by engaging our hearts in its behalf. Hence the

the generosity of *Joseph*, and the wickedness of his brothers, are equal matter of improvement and edification to our minds.

When the Tragedy of *Douglas* becomes yet more public, it will appear to have a tendency similar to this. The designs of one person are painted in such colours of hateful depravity, as to become a necessary object of detestation. The mistakes of another awaken our caution, and become a lesson of prudence. The generous and elevated mind of a third, warm and exalt our sentiments ; and that person, on whom the chief distress of this story falls, moves to compassion, and proves at last a warning against rash and fatal despair. Agreeable to this short representation, the performance has found a favourable reception with the public, and given proof how far grave and serious compositions may engage the minds of men, and convey instruction under the shew of amusement. It has likewise had the ordinary testimony of distinguished merit ; it has struck out some sparks of envy and spite. This kind of fire, we may believe, is seldom extinct, but it only flames upon extraordinary occasions, when any remarkable merit, or a rising fame is to be consumed. People who carried it in their breast, have paid their duty regularly to every good Writer in every age ; in so much that their attendance is now required to compleat his honours : Their silence therefore would have been

been the severest blow they could have struck at the Author of *Douglas*. I think very differently indeed of those who are sincerely anxious for the interest of religion, and who censure every Writer of a Play, because they apprehend somewhat immoral and offensive in the very nature of the Stage. I respect the intentions of such, however I may think them mistaken in this particular, and flatter myself, that, whilst we agree in condemning any particular abuses which may have place on the Stage, we shall likewise be of one mind in applauding whatever will contribute to render the amusements of that place inoffensive and instructive. This is the only point I have laboured in this Paper, and only plead against an opinion which would place all Theatrical performances upon the same level. With the people who are likely to oppose me, the very name of a Play implies somewhat criminal and immoral. A near view of the subject should be sufficient to correct this apprehension; but, whilst any respectable authority continues in favour of it, we can scarcely expect to remove it entirely. The authority of the Christian Church is supposed by some to be clearly on that side of the question: But will any body say, that the Christian Church has invariably discouraged good Plays. In the times of our Saviour and his Apostles, the purest times of the Christian Church, no such marks of disapprobation appear. The
Fathers

Fathers of the Church, whose authority is probably referred to on this occasion, ought surely to have very little credit with us on their own account : A great part of the superstition of the Church of *Rome* is derived from their inventions ; and we have already totally rejected the authority of them and their Oral Traditions, when we reformed the corruptions of the Popish Church. We may however, in charity, allow, that they might have had some reason for their opposition to Stage-Plays. Christianity, in their times, was struggling for a full establishment ; and they thought that Stage-Plays, being of Heathen composition, and having frequent reference to Pagan Divinity, might recal the minds of men to their former superstition. We have reason to believe, that, if Plays of a Christian strain had appeared, they would have met with no opposition from the friends of Christianity : For *Gregory Nazianzen*, a Father of the Church, and a person of great piety, endeavoured to supplant Heathen Plays, by introducing one which he wrote himself, on the most interesting subject of our religion. And we must so far confess that he acted a wise part : For, when corrupt performances are admitted on the Stage, the best thing we can do is to reject them, and supply their place with compositions more favourable to the important concerns of religion and morality. If the Plays on our Stage have not
hitherto

hitherto been altogether pure, we have certainly been unlucky in the long silence we have kept on that subject; and doubly unlucky in breaking out with our censure, at a time when one very successful attempt was made to supply the Stage with a Play, which might contribute to its reformation. The Popish Clergy, we know, exclaimed against the Stage, when it took part with the Reformers, and helped to overturn their own power: For it is well known, that Plays were acted at the Reformation, which very much helped on that work, by exposing the vices and absurdities of the Popish Clergy: It is no wonder therefore that they were enemies to the Stage; but we cannot surely have any resentment to the Stage in our days, because it formerly offended the Popish Clergy in promoting the Reformation.

When we come to consider the law and doctrine of our Church with respect to Stage-Plays, it will appear that the censure which performances of this nature now meet with, doth not arise from any law, statute or established doctrine in this Church. We may even venture to affirm, that the prejudice to Plays in general is of late origin. The only act of this Church relating to Stage-Plays, which I have ever heard quoted, is an act of the Assembly which met in the year 1574. An act in the following terms. * “That no Comedies

* Vid. Petrie's Church History.

“ Comedies or Tragedies or such Plays should
 “ be made on any subject of canonical Scrip-
 “ tures, nor on the *Sabbath Day*. If any Mi-
 “ nister be the Writer of such a Play, he
 “ shall be deprived of his Ministry: As for
 “ Plays of another subject, they also should
 “ be examined before they be propounded
 “ publickly.” This act of Assembly, we see,
 supposes that Plays are allowable, and that
 Ministers may write Plays on the subject of
 any history, which is not taken from canonical
 Scripture. So far the practice is agreeable
 to the laws of this established Church, and it
 is not pretended that there is any other eccle-
 siastical law now in being with respect to
 Stage-Plays. We hear indeed of certain Pro-
 ceedings of the Presbytery of *Edinburgh* about
 thirty years ago, when they published an ad-
 monition to discourage the Stage. We would
 willingly believe, for the honour of the dead,
 that they took this step in opposition to some
 faulty and immoral Plays which were then
 acted, and that they would have been loth to
 discourage performances of a better tendency,
 which might promise a reformation of such
 abuses. Their example, at any rate, is no
 law; and to follow them without examinati-
 on would imply a concession of infallibility,
 which they never laid claim to. It is needless
 to mention the names of Clergymen of un-
 questioned reputation in the Christian Church,
 who have written Plays for the Stage; or to
 mention

mention how frequent it is to consider a right taste and judgment in such performances, as an accomplishment necessary to every man of letters, whether Clergyman or layman. Such authorities can be but of little avail after we have had the subject itself before us, and an opportunity of judging for ourselves. I shall therefore go on to take another view of the Stage, and consider some inconveniencies which are supposed to attend it. Few things of human concern are free from inconveniencies ; we need not therefore be surprized, that some are apprehended to belong to the Stage. We may suspect that Theatrical Entertainments engage the minds at least of our youth too much, and carry them away from other subjects of attention, which make a part either of their business or their education. This suspicion is equally well grounded with respect to every other amusement : For people who are disposed to be idle, will easily find avocations from business ; and the Stage has one peculiar advantage, its being the amusement only of a stated time, and not always at hand to tempt people who are idly disposed. This objection goes upon a supposition that persons of all tempers run with equal eagerness to the amusements of the Stage ; they differ however greatly from one another in this particular, and they who are the most captivated with them, acquire a degree of coolness and indifference from time and familiarity. We may venture

venture to ask whether knowledge, whether industry and commerce have declined in this City since the Play-house was first opened here. It will be owned that they have rather increased. We may appeal to persons who have the care of the education of youth in other places, whether they would not gladly see their pupils come to the Theatre, and mix with grave and decent company, if by that means they could break up more dangerous meetings for low gaming and riot, where youth have no good example to lead them, and no restraint from a sense of decency or shame. The Stage, I think, may well bear a comparison with other amusements which youth will devise for themselves, if they are debarred from this. When we consider the strain of those Plays which have met with the most favourable reception from the public, observations will occur to the honour of human nature ; for they are Plays which excel in moving compassion, which interest an audience in behalf of amiable characters, which give the proper applause to virtue, and treat vice with ignominy and reproach. A tragedy, which fails in exciting these emotions, or which would shock our favourable apprehensions of virtue, would soon be rejected with disgust. We may consult on this point an author, whom we hold in such esteem, that we make our children read his works, almost as early as their catechism. He has observed, that

a Play, tho' defective in ornament, and without any affectation to please by pompous and sounding expression ; if it is furnished with a just moral and true representation of nature, will carry the preference with every audience from more splendid and showy performances. When we see an audience therefore in tears for an object of compassion, when we find them affected with the generous sentiments which come from a virtuous character, deeply engaged in wishes for the success of the good, and for the disappointment of the wicked ; it would scarcely occur that such an audience could be better employed in an hour of leisure. Whatever our peculiar occupations are, virtue is the business of all, and we should not be excluded from any place where it may be learned. We know how few amusements there are for which this plea can be offered : It is well, we think, if they are innocent relaxations from business, we seldom expect to find them schools of morality. But were this plea laid aside, we ought to make sure that other amusements, less favourable to the habits of business, may not come in the way of our youth ; and that our pretended severity may not prove the occasion of greater licentiousness. It will be said that our youth may go too often to the Play-house. They may go too often to any amusement ; but we are assured here that they can go no oftener than plays are acted, which is by no means so frequent

quent, as other avocations from business may occur to them. As there is a danger that youth may exceed in every amusement they are given to, those amusements should be most discouraged, in which the excess is most dangerous. I will venture to say that no place of public resort, under the influence of decency, and in the presence of respectable persons, can be so dangerous, as cabals which are formed in secret, and apart from such influence. If any abuses yet remain on our Stage, we should not delay to reform them. But I have mentioned these abuses so often, that some of my readers will begin to have a very terrible notion of them : However, I will venture to inform them, that no abuse was ever admitted on any Stage, but might pass for perfect decency, when compared to what they may have often heard at a gossiping, a merry-making, or a meeting of young fellows. The Playhouse is frequented by people of both sexes, whose rank, whose age and manners, are sufficient to command respect, and to bring decency along with them into any place. It is an uncommon compliment we pay them, in supposing that our youth are corrupted in their company ; I should rather think, that, considering the nature of the entertainment, and the respect due to the company, we should see, with satisfaction, such spectacles become a part in the amusements of our youth, and hope that their idle hours would find there,
not

not only agreeable relaxation, but improvement too.

It has, I understand, given offence of late, that, persons of grave and respectable character, were present at the representation of a new tragedy, which they thought a good one. Great part of this offence should be removed, when we recollect that this, and many such performances, have a tendency very favourable to sobriety and morality; for they must be very dignified characters indeed who must keep at a distance, when the advancement of virtue is in any degree concerned. Their part of the censure, however, is put in a new light. It is said, that altho' a practice may be innocent in itself, yet persons of grave character ought to avoid it, because it gives offence to other people; and being thought immoral, their neighbour may by such an example, be shaken and unsettled in what he thinks his own duty. We are instructed to this purpose in the eighth chapter of *Paul's* epistle to the *Corinthians*, where he considers the practice of eating meat, which had been offered to idols. The reader will be pleased to observe, that this instruction relates to actions, in their own nature indifferent, and cannot be applied to any other. The Apostle explains it in the eighth verse in these words: "Meat commendeth us not to God: for neither if we eat are we the better, neither if we eat not are we the worse." He ends the

the chapter with this conclusion ; “ Where-
 “ fore, if meat make my brother offend,
 “ I will eat no flesh while the world stand-
 “ eth, lest I make my brother offend.” If
 the eating of such meat had been criminal in
 itself, he would have avoided, and forbid the
 practice on that account. If on the contra-
 ry it had been right, and a commendable
 practice, he would have embraced it, and
 studied to correct the prejudice which any
 person might have entertained against it. For
 his whole life was a continued course of op-
 position to both *Jews* and *Gentiles*, where their
 prejudices stood in need of correction. Let
 us therefore apply the Apostle’s instruction and
 example to the present question. Is it per-
 fectly indifferent to a man whether he goes to
 a play or no ? I shall suppose that it is. Is it
 likewise indifferent to the public what sort of
 people compose the ordinary audience at our
 Theatre ? I believe it is not. The Manager
 of every theatre must suit his entertainments
 to the company, and if he is not supported by
 the grave and the sober, he must suit him-
 self to the licentious and profane. We know
 that the language of the theatre, or any other
 language whatever, may be employed either
 to recommend virtue, or to insinuate folly and
 licentiousness. If licentious people alone fre-
 quent this entertainment, they will perhaps
 encourage what they like to hear. But per-
 sons of sobriety, and regard to virtue, would
 make

make that entertainment form itself to a very different strain, and give the whole a very different influence on the manners of mankind. They would reject and condemn what was exceptionable, they would promote and encourage what was agreeable to sound reason, and favourable to virtue. Happily for us, this is no new thing; for the Play-house has been long the resort of persons of both sexes, who are the most scrupulous on the point of reputation and decency; and their presence has, no doubt, contributed to reform some abuses, which may have, at some times, crept into the stage. Their presence therefore has done a great service to mankind; and if any person is prejudiced enough to think otherwise, 'tis high time he was undeceived. The Apostle instructs us to refrain from an indifferent action, if it offend our brother; but he has often commanded, and has shown the example, to do good in the face of prejudice, and every such prejudice in time will be corrected. We know that in every nation there must be amusements and public entertainments, and the Stage has always made one in every civilized and polished nation. We cannot hope to abolish it; and if we could, we should only make way for the return of drunkenness, gaming, and rude cabals, which the more decent conversation and manners of civilized times, have in a great measure abolished. We should not even propose

pose to abolish an entertainment, which is founded on the best principles of human nature, the love of virtue, and compassion to the distressed : For who would ever go to a tragedy, if he had not a heart formed to pity, and a mind susceptible of the admiration due to worthy characters. It is the duty of grave and respectable men to watch over an entertainment of this kind, that it may not deviate from the good purposes which it is calculated to serve. What they do to this purpose, either in opposing the bad or promoting the good, is matter of duty, and their conduct in it is not to be regulated by the opinion of any person who is pleased to take offence.

The state of the poor has been mentioned, as a consideration which must render this entertainment at present pernicious and criminal. We cannot be too attentive to every circumstance which can affect the state of the poor, in the difficulties which they are now threatened with ; and we have reason to believe, that the Gentlemen of this country are well disposed to take any measures which may be thought proper for their relief. How the Theatre comes to be thought any hindrance to such measures, we cannot easily apprehend. The poor may be divided into two classes ; those who are indigent, but still in a condition to earn their bread by some sort of labour or industry ; and those, on the other hand, who

who, by reason of age or sickness, are unable to earn any subsistence. It is remarkable, that of late years more care has been taken than formerly to provide for the poor, who are unfit for any kind of labour. Poor-houses have been built in many parishes, under the management of the Gentlemen and people of substance, who have taxed themselves for that purpose. It were cruel therefore to load the body of our Gentlemen with an imputation of neglect in this article, at a time when their conduct deserves commendation. And it were imprudent by such an imputation to encourage any person able to work in the expectation that he may be idle, and yet receive gratuitous charities. If any person were rich enough for the undertaking, he could not possibly do a more signal mischief to his country, than that of maintaining the whole poor of *Great Britain* in idleness. It has pleased Providence, for wise purposes, to place men in different stations, and to bestow upon them different degrees of wealth. Without this circumstance there could be no subordination, no government, no order, no industry. Every person does good, and promotes the happiness of society, by living agreeable to the rank in which Providence has placed him. Whilst his gratuitous charities relieve the poor who are unable to work, his other expence becomes a fund for the subsistence of the industrious; nor is it proper that they should expect subsistence

sistence upon any other terms than those of industry and sobriety. The money which the rich expends is paid for the labour of the poor. Different trades live upon the profits of furnishing his cloathing, his table, and his equipage. It is evident how many poor industrious people would starve, if he did not buy the works which they furnish him. The very money he lays out for amusement comes at last into the hands of the poor, and is paid as the price of their labour. A part of it we shall suppose is laid out for the amusements of the Theatre, and the people who receive it there, are so many hands who distribute that money among the industrious poor. Every Player must be cloathed, maintained and lodged: The money which he receives therefor is paid at last to the spinstres, the weaver, the clothier, and other tradesmen who live by furnishing the ordinary necessaries of life. Whilst from humanity we indulge the poor in their station, we ought from justice to indulge the wealthy in theirs, and to expect that they are to go on agreeable to the habits of living which belong to their station, and which in effect are necessary to the order and good of society, and to the maintenance of the poor. If we shut up our places of entertainment, and deprive people of distinction of that society and those amusements which they have a relish for, they must tire of living among us; and the few who yet remain will chuse

to remove to another place, where they will not meet with popular antipathy, on account of their most commendable amusements. Then indeed the money they expend would be lost to the poor of their native country. This and every other city would feel, in such a case, that the residence of persons of fortune is necessary to give any number of tradesmen, and industrious poor, the means of subsistence. How hard must it appear then, to give any encouragement to the poor to murmur against a circumstance from which their industry may derive such advantage? We may ask, who are the most forward in this country to form charitable designs for the relief of the poor? The Gentlemen of this neighbourhood, I think, have set the example; and they too who were the readiest to shed tears, for the distresses represented in the Tragedy of *Douglas*, have been the most forward in compassion to the poor, and in liberal designs for their relief.

After all I must confess that one consideration remains, which must renew my diffidence on this point. A body of men respectable for their learning and gravity, who constitute a judicature in this city, have, without any exception, declared their disapprobation of the Theatre in general; and, to show that no exception could be admitted, have taken the alarm, just when the Tragedy, which I have had occasion to mention, was introduced. I cannot

cannot pretend to speak of their reasons for so doing, until they are pleased to publish them; but must entertain great expectations of their force, since they are sufficient to overpower what has appeared on the opposite side. Men of gravity are above trifling with the mistakes and misapprehensions of a people, and certainly cannot long ly under any such imputation. Men of learning need not be told, that part of every liberal education consists, in learning to distinguish between Theatrical performances which are faulty, and those which have a moral dignity and a good tendency; they know that a good Tragedy has been in all ages esteemed amongst the chief productions of human ability; that the authors of such works become more renowned with posterity than the princes and monarchs of the earth. The names of *Buchanan* and *Milton* are more respected than those of *Henry* and *James*; and the names of *Cyrus* and *Xerxes* are less celebrated than those of *Sophocles* and *Euripides*. I am, from these considerations, the more inclined to believe, that reasons have occurred against the Stage, which will appear very urgent when they are produced; and cannot imagine, that objections which ly against bad Plays only are now all the objections they have to plead against a good one, which may be considered as an attempt to make the Stage truly useful and instructive.

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This respectable body of men have passed a severe sentence against one of their number, for being present at this representation we are speaking of. This likewise seems to proceed from some powerful motive not sufficiently known : For they were not led to this act of severity, in execution of any law or statute of this Church. It must have been one of those extraordinary cases where a discretionary power is necessary. Such a power indeed is not assumed by any court of judicature in Europe, except one, which I will not name on this occasion. It is happy for us, that the law of our Church has expressly forbid the exercise of any such arbitrary and dangerous power. See *Form of Process*, cap. 1. and 84. where it is expressly enacted, “ That nothing
 “ be admitted by any Church-judicature as the
 “ ground of a process for censure but what
 “ has been declared censurable by the Word
 “ of God, or by some act or universal custom
 “ of this National Church.”——They were perhaps led to a proceeding, in appearance so little agreeable to the fundamental laws of their own society, by a zeal to support the laws of the State. People indeed are often more fond of work which they devise for themselves, than they are of any business assigned them by others. It does not however appear, that they have done much honour to the legislature by their interposition on this occasion. They have cast an imputation of impiety

piety upon an amusement which the law formally authorises in the Metropolis, which Our GRACIOUS SOVEREIGN honours with his presence, and which the most respectable persons in the legislature of *Great Britain* support by their countenance.

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